

# *Book Review*

## Collateral Damage: Social Inequalities in a Global Age

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***Collateral Damage: Social Inequalities in a Global Age.***  
**Zygmunt Bauman. Cambridge, Polity Press 2011; 224**  
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**A**uthored a couple of years back by Zygmunt Bauman, *Collateral Damage* synthesizes not only the whole of his long and well-recognized career but also his concern on the great asymmetries generated by capitalism. The current climate of production is dubbed as “liquid modernity” by Bauman. His main thesis centers on the belief that there is a great asymmetry between haves and have-nots. The State of welfare which was originally oriented to protect citizenry set the pace to a new climate where states pose the risk on individuals in order for them to face them individually. Looking for proactive forms of

protection, which ranges from insurance towards surveillance mechanism of control, citizens are left between the wall and blue sea. In this sense, there is a gap between *oikos* and *ekklesia*. While the former signals to the private sphere of life, the latter one refers to the public negotiation of actors. In order for democracy to survive, politics should grant equilibrium between the two contrasting interests, nuancing the potential tensions that may surface.

As the above remarks note, risks should be self-managed by each citizen by appealing to the products of market. This paves the ways for a radical transformation whereby citizens become consumers. As Bauman puts it, consuming life has played a crucial role via the criticism exerted by communism to the Keynesian state of welfare. In part, because Marxists concluded the state of welfare was based on the exploitation of the workforce, or because poverty was never alleviated, their criticism postponed setting free the barriers in order for market to be mushroomed. Involuntarily or not, communism created some conditions for the adoption of an economy of desire. However, once this tendency was consolidated, communism facilitated the things for the appearance of a new state, where individual desires and emotions (such as fear) were exploited and rechanneled by the market. The question whether the rational technique, which characterized modernity, alluded to the whole protection of society or not, this liquid modernity exploited the uncertainty to exert control over the workforce. On one hand, no less true is that the psychological fear was conducive for the elite to keep control. On the other hand, the state of disasters awakened by human intervention recycled the work force that remained unable to be transformed into commodity. In a world of global consumers those who are not financially able to consume are relegated as under-class. This type of new group faces the worse effects of disasters. Citing one

of the books of Michel Crouzier, Bauman explains that the concept of uncertainty, ignored by Weber in his analysis of capitalism that was based on German bureaucracy, exerts a direct control over the whole organization. In contrast to Weber, Crozier admits that those directors who are next to the lines of uncertainty are in better conditions to control others located in more peripheral positions. This observation leads Bauman to think the axiom of uncertainty, left behind by Weberian sociology, allows the creation of rules and a legal disposition to make others follow their own desires. This was exactly what policy makers observed in the liquid modernism, when they appealed to the inflation of risk as a dissuasive mechanism to subject the “Others.” This fascinating project is formed in three relevant axioms,

- a) The conception of politics and the role of Others (chapter I, II, III and IV)
- b) The moral decline accelerated by the adoption of a new consuming life. (Chapter V, VI, VII, and VIII)
- c) The banality of evilness in the terms of Arendt as a platform for critical thinking declines (IV, X and XI).

One of the contradictions of global capitalism consists in the dichotomy between liberty and oppression. At a time when top-ranked classes are legally conferred to consume and move at their discretion, lower ones are subject to exploitation and control, suspected as dangerous agents who need to be effaced. In perspective, far from being stable, globalization has expanded the pillars of states and undermined the social trust. We feel a radical fear because our obsession for technology and security, Bauman adds. Even though in few pages, *Collateral Damage* exhibits a deep reading with respect to modern society and social Darwinism, as well as the radicalization of otherness. In

this vein two relevant assumption merit discussion. At a first glance, fear plays a crucial role in configuring a new type of political indoctrination that far from represents valid forms of democratic practices. Citizens are pressed to self-manage their own destiny, purchasing the products the market offers to make this life a better place. Secondly, those who do not have all the necessary requirements to become in a consumer are pushed to an under-class. This is the reason why governments do not show the minimal efforts to correct the asymmetries that wreak havoc in lower classes.

What Bauman discusses is to what extent the logic of the market destroyed the fields of ethics. Disasters not only were conducive to the market's logic, but they also would recycle the classes that remain dysfunctional in the consuming system. Last but not least, this masterful work reflects a vast trajectory of Bauman in social issues as well as an all-encompassing view of the negative effects of liquid capitalism.